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**THE
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THE
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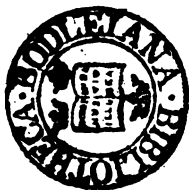
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BY
THOMAS COLEMAN,

“The Lord added unto the church daily, such as should be saved.”
ACTS ii. 47.

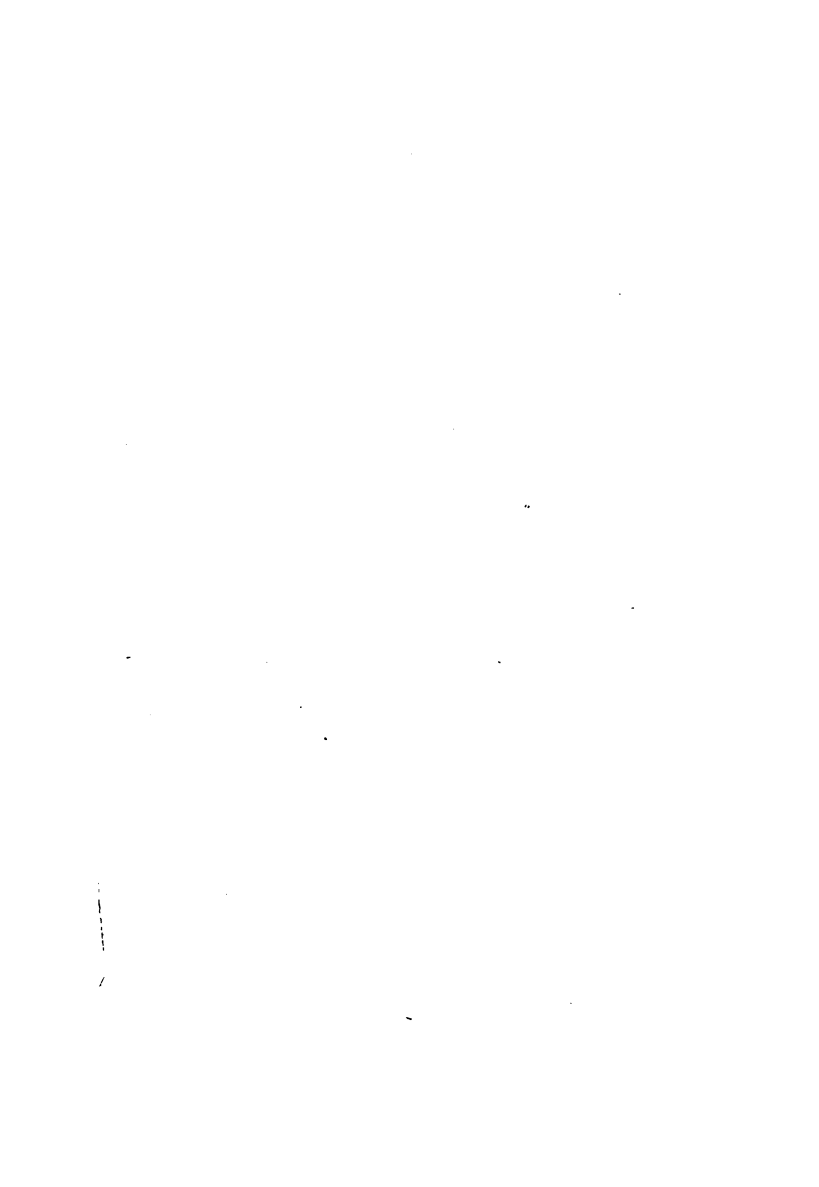
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PREFACE.

THE following pages are written principally for those who hold what are called congregational principles, in relation to the constitution and government of the Church of Christ. According to these principles, a christian church is a voluntary society of professed followers of the Redeemer ; united together in obedience to his will ; with a view to his glory and their mutual improvement ; in attending to the public worship of God, and the ministry of his word ; observing the special ordinances of the gospel, and seeking the advancement of the Saviour's cause. Every such Society is to be regarded as having a right to admit members to its communion ; looking upon those only as fit for the privilege who are penitent believers in Christ, and who are concerned to walk according to his will. They must adopt some method by which they may judge of the characters of those who are presented as candidates for communion with them ; whether this be simply by conversation

with the pastor and deacons who report the result to the church ; or by a statement presented to the church from the candidate ; either of which must be connected with an observation of the spirit and conduct. Whatever method be adopted to attain the end desired, it is evident, that a church is called to receive such as it has reason to hope Christ has received ; and that nothing further is to be required as essential to communion, than what is essential to the christian character and hope.

When any persons, appear in the character of Candidates for christian fellowship and are about to become united to a church of Christ, it is of great importance that they should have some correct views of the nature and consequences of such an engagement ; that as they are about to be placed in a new relation to the church, and in a new position before the world, they should understand what it is, and the obligations which it involves ; that they should know what privileges are open to them ;—what duties devolve upon them ;—what the church has a right to expect ;—what the world may justly look for ;—what is to be their great aim as professors of the christian faith.

There are many things connected with this subject which cannot be so fully and frequently *introduced* into public ministrations, as to give

instruction to every candidate that may desire to enter into communion with the church ; and it is scarcely possible to enter fully into these things by conversation with them ; it appears therefore desirable to have some brief and comprehensive manual to put into their hands, that might plainly and impressively set before them those points with which it is important that they should have some acquaintance when entering on the christian profession.

It is a lamentable fact, that great numbers become members of Christian Churches with very inadequate, if not improper views, of the nature of the relation they have taken upon them and of the duties connected with it, and soon discover a very great inattention to its privileges and obligations ; partly arising from ignorance of what they did, and of what would be required of them. On these accounts the writer has thought that a little work of this nature, adapted to the cases of those who are just entering on the christian profession, might be of some service to the cause of Christ. Desiring that what he has written may in some humble measure promote the glory of the Redeemer, the purity of the churches, and the interests of truth, holiness, and peace, he commends it to the consideration of the reader and the blessing of God.

INTRODUCTION.

The principles upon which the New Testament Churches were formed may be fully gathered from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the inspired Epistles. From the former we learn, that when the Apostles, or Evangelists, preached the gospel in any place, those who truly received it became united together as brethren in Christ; they met together for divine worship and christian instruction; for the celebration of the dying love of the Redeemer according to his institution; united to their Lord, and to one another, in the exercise of faith and love. As the gospel was first preached in the different parts into which Palestine was then divided, so we first read of the "Churches throughout all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee;" of their "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; being edified, and multiplied." In every other part to which they travelled, of which we have any inspired record on this subject, the accounts are similar, of believers being

added to the Lord, and churches being formed consisting of those believers. When we look into the epistles to the churches, we find that they are addressed to Societies as composed of saints, i. e. holy persons, sanctified, and set apart for God ; “ faithful brethren, holy and beloved, partakers of the benefit ; ” “ exercising faith in Christ Jesus, and love to all the saints.” These churches are also directed “ to receive such as Christ has received ; ” “ to put away from among themselves wicked persons ; ” “ to withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly,” &c. All which plainly teaches, that every voluntary society of professed believers in Christ constitutes a christian church ; that those only are eligible for communion with such a society, who make a credible profession of faith in the Saviour, as new creatures in Christ Jesus concerned to walk according to his will. Those who appear to possess this character, and are willing to become united to the church with whom they worship, for the commemoration with them of the Redeemer’s death at his table, and for all the purposes of social piety ; such, are suitable candidates for christian fellowship ; and it is for their guidance and encouragement that the following pages are written.

Here I would lay before them a brief statement of the nature of a church of Christ, and of the

design for which christian churches are formed, that they may distinctly perceive what they are to have in view when they unite themselves to such a society. A church then, I observe, is to be regarded according to the accounts presented to us in the New Testament, simply as an association of christians, united together for spiritual purposes, assembling in the name of Christ to observe his institutions. Wherever there is any number of christians, living so near to each other, as to be able to meet together to attend to the ordinances of the gospel, there is a church of Christ, when they are united as followers of the Redeemer.

Now, let us especially notice, with what design such societies or associations are formed, according to the will of Christ. The exclusive notion that some appear to have of the design of a church, is, that it is for the celebration of the Lord's Supper; and the only or principal thing which they have in view in joining a church, is, that they may commemorate the death of Christ with his people. But this is quite an inadequate idea, of the design of a church, and of the object of joining a church. The design was not merely that the followers of Christ might on certain occasions sit down together at the table of the Lord, and partake of the memorials of the Saviour's love; this is not

the whole, nor is it the principal part of the purpose for which such societies were to be formed. This is one solemn engagement to which the church is bound to attend ; but there are further and more momentous objects even than this, to be accomplished. Christian churches are intended to give to all the servants of Christ, an opportunity openly to appear for him, to show that they are united together in his cause, as their common Lord and master ; that they may use all suitable means for the spiritual welfare of one another ; that they may uphold the interests of christian truth and piety in the world ; and promote the diffusion of the gospel among their fellow creatures, all aiming to advance the glory of the Saviour. They are to be connected together as brethren in Christ, all one in him united by faith and love to the same Lord, heirs of the same glorious hope, debtors to the same boundless love, partakers of the same spirit of grace, all under the greatest obligations to glorify their God. The design then with which they are to unite, is to be in accordance with this character, these privileges and obligations. Those who wish to enter a church of Christ, are to have such a design in view, and to be willing to do every thing in their power by which it may be promoted.

Such Societies as these, for such a purpose, form a great moral engine which the Redeemer

has planned and set at work, to extend his cause, display his glory, and promote the interests of immortal souls on earth. They are most admirably adapted for the end designed, if all that belong to them do but take a right view of this design, enter with all their hearts into it, and do all that they can towards its accomplishment. Though the benefit of each individual christian will be secured, by a proper attention to the institutions of christianity as observed in the church, yet it was not with a view to individual benefit only that the church was instituted, but that the good of the whole might be promoted, and that each one might be a blessing to others, and that gospel light, and truth, and purity might be diffused around them. The lamp of heavenly truth is to be held up, kept continually burning, and shedding its light by the ministry of the gospel which they maintain, and by the stated celebration of divine ordinances. It is also to shine by the constant living influence of divine truths and principles, as exhibited by all the members of the church, to the view of those who observe them. Whatever gifts may be possessed by any of the members of the church, they are to be cultivated and employed, under the superintendence of the church, and the guidance of its great head, to further the interests of religion amongst themselves, and amongst their fellow-

creatures. The letters written by the apostles to the churches, clearly shew that they were formed for such purposes as these. They are directed to "consider one another; to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, but exhorting one another." "To comfort themselves together, and to edify one another." "To warn them that are unruly; to comfort the feeble minded; to support the weak." "To hold forth the word of life, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they should shine as lights in the world." Thus christians associated together, by their united prayers, their sympathy, their mutual watchfulness, their warnings, their counsels, their co-operation in every good work, would greatly aid one another in the divine life, and in the practice of all christian duties: by a united concern for the honour of Christ, and the extension of his kingdom; by a tender compassion for the souls of men, and a constant concern for their conversion and salvation, they would prove a great blessing in the place where they were fixed, while by their united efforts they would greatly advance the cause of Christ in the world. Their profession of attachment to Christ; their communion together in his ordinances, especially in the commemoration of his sufferings and death as an atonement for sin, the only

foundation of their hope, would be a standing testimony to the world that they received him as their Saviour, obeyed and honoured him as their Lord and King. When a christian church was seen to be thus acting on the principles of the gospel : seeking the good of others in connexion with the glory of their Lord ; it would shew that there was a reality in religion. And though imperfections might be discerned, and the world would be ready to make the most of these, yet the church would be endowed with a great moral power : and would act with great energy on the world, attended by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

CHAPTER I.

AN ADDRESS TO THE CANDIDATE FOR CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, ON HIS EXPERIENCE AND HIS PRINCIPLES.

It is a most important period in the history of a fallen creature, an immortal being, when he is about openly to profess his dependance on the Saviour of sinners, and his hope of eternal Salvation. At such a period, it is necessary most seriously to consider, what acquaintance you have with real christianity; and what are the principles by which you should be actuated. Most reasonably is it expected, if you desire to be united to a christian Society, that you should have some experimental knowledge of divine things; not that you should have made great advancement, or have risen to high attainments in religion; but that you should have really begun to attend with all the heart, to the things that relate to your eternal Salvation. If you are coming forward in a suitable spirit, to connect yourself with the followers of the Redeemer, you have had such a view of your true character before God, as a fallen and guilty creature, as deeply to feel your need of that Saviour whom

the gospel presents before you ; to resort to him as the refuge of your soul, and to depend on him as the foundation of your hope for acceptance and Salvation.

As to the *manner* in which you may have been brought to a penitential return to God through Christ Jesus ; or the *means* that may have been blest for this purpose ; these things are of no essential consequence. *Whether you have been awakened in a remarkable manner ; arrested in a sudden way ; feeling conviction come with awful power upon your heart ; so that trembling with a sense of your dreadful guilt and danger, you have cried for relief from the depths of distress and terror ; and have at length obtained such joy and peace in believing in Christ as the all-sufficient Saviour, that you have come as it were into a new world, and are filled with admiration and delight at the grace of God discovered to you ; as has been the case with some, who have been converted to the faith of Christ ; or whether you have, like many others, been brought in a more mild and gentle method ; having been gradually led by the divine blessing on the means of grace, to an acquaintance with your own sinful state ; the need you have of an atoning Saviour ; and the great importance of a believing acceptance of him and devotedness to him : so as to exercise

repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ; if you are but truly brought hither it is of no essential importance in what way you have been led. The Lord adopts a variety of methods to bring back sinners to himself, and never intended that the case of any one should be a standard for others. All that is essential is, that you should view yourself in the light in which the word of God presents your character before you, as a depraved, guilty transgressor ; so as to be humbled before God on account of your sins ; to justify him in the threatened punishment which his holy law denounces ; to hate and depart from all iniquity ; to accept of divine mercy through the mediation and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the divinely appointed Saviour of sinners, by whose work the law is fulfilled, justice satisfied and the character of God glorified, while Salvation is freely bestowed on believing souls. To him you apply ; on him you depend ; into his hands you commit your eternal all : receiving him as your prophet to teach, your priest to atone and intercede, and your king to rule over you ; desiring ever to follow him as your example and guide.

You know something in reality of these things, dear reader, if you are a suitable candidate for communion with a church of Christ, if you can with right views and feelings commemorate the

love of Christ at his table. With this knowledge of the way of Salvation, and with this regard to the Redeemer, you are now willing to renounce the world with its sinful pursuits ; and to depart from all the iniquitous practices to which you may have been addicted, or which you see prevailing around. It is your concern, "to come out from among them, and be separate, and not to touch the unclean thing." Your great aim is, to pursue a course essentially different from that in which the thoughtless and the ungodly are walking. Your relish for carnal pleasures is gone. You see their vanity, sinfulness, and folly, and are willing to give up all participation in them. You value the pleasures of true piety, and seek your happiness in its pursuits.

You now desire to give some open testimony of your regard for the Saviour ; to attend his ordinances, to glorify his name ; anxious to be visibly connected with him, with his cause, and with his people, that you may walk in the footsteps of his flock. Discerning the importance, and the blessedness, of those paths of holiness in which the saints are directed to walk, you would go with them because God is with them. Willing to confess Christ before men, and to appear as his decided follower, you would, having first given your ownself to the Lord, give *yourself to his people* according to his will.

These things include all that is essential to an union with a church of Christ, and to a right to partake of the ordinances of the Gospel. If you can go thus far, you are welcome to the fellowship of the Church; welcome to the Table of the Lord. Permit me then to point out to you a little further, some of the great principles by which you are to be influenced in making a christian profession. Though these have been intimated in what we have already said, yet it is important to have them more distinctly and fully stated.

1. *Love to your great Lord, and to his people,* is the first great principle that should lead you to seek an union with his church.

You trust that you have discerned something of the excellencies of the Saviour's character; you view him in his own glories as worthy of your highest regard; he is in your estimation, as he is in himself, "altogether lovely." To him your heart is surrendered; he has the supremacy in your soul. You love all those that belong to him, that breathe his spirit, and tread in his footsteps. Hence, from this principle of love to Christ and to his people, you deem it an honour and happiness, to bear the name of Christ; to have a place in his church on earth; to be united with the saints in the bonds of the Gospel; to have communion with the Saviour, and with his

followers in divine ordinances. "Lovest thou me?" may be considered as the great inquiry, which the Redeemer proposes to every candidate for the fellowship of his church. See to it that this is the great principle by which you are governed.

2. A principle of *gratitude* must have a similar influence.

You feel that you have much cause to be grateful for the mercies of God towards you. You admire the kindness manifested to you during the days of unregeneracy and sin; the patience that has spared you, that you were not cast off in a state of rebellion, and consigned to the abode of misery. But still more, you admire the grace that has constrained your spirit to bow to the Saviour; that has blest to you the means of grace, the word of divine truth; that has led you to his cross; and that has given you the hope and the peace which his Gospel affords. You feel emotions of lively gratitude for the love of Christ, for the amazing work of his grace, for all the discoveries which his Gospel brings. Your language surely is, "what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" "I would take the cup of Salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord, I would pay my vows in the Lord's house, in the *presence of all his people.*" Grateful affection

will lead you to come and declare what he has done for your soul ; and to make a full and open surrender of yourself to him in the way which his word has pointed out to you.

3. A principle of *obedience* to the will of Christ is to influence you in this engagement. While you look to Christ as the Saviour in whom you trust, you are to look to him also as the Sovereign whom you are to obey. You are to bow to him as the King in Zion, by whose laws you are to be governed. When you first yielded yourself to him you said, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? " When the spirit of affection rose towards him, you heard him say, " If ye love me keep my commandments. " " He that keepeth my word, he it is that loveth me. " Now you see that he commands his followers to " confess him before men. " " To do this in remembrance of him. " You are conscious, therefore, that you cannot remain in a state of separation from his followers and regardless of his ordinances, without direct disobedience to his will, and known sin against him. You would therefore from the regard you feel bound to pay to his will, and from delight in acts of obedience to him whom you are called to serve and obey, thus appear for him, and be united with his church. At the same time it will be your great concern, to carry

this principle through the whole of your course, in reference to all that the Saviour has enjoined.

4. There should be a principle of *attachment* to the *cause* of Christ, and a desire for its promotion. You consider the public worship of God, the ministry of divine truth and the celebration of divine ordinances, as adapted to further the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom: that it is incumbent on all his servants to feel a deep interest in what relates to the advancement and prosperity of his cause in the world: and that it is their duty to be united together to promote the glory of their Lord, the increase of his church, and the welfare of their fellow creatures. On this principle you will be concerned to take a part with the saints in the pursuit of these great ends; feeling that you are called to live for the glory of him "who loved you and gave himself for you."

Let no lower principles than these influence you, my reader, in the act which you are contemplating. It is a sacred spiritual engagement, not to be performed in order to gain the good opinion of your fellow creatures: not with a view to stand fair with your fellow christians: much less to answer any sinister or worldly purpose. Nor are you to do it, because you may be pressed to it, by some who think well of your character, and are desirous of obtaining your

assistance in the church of Christ. But you are to remember that it is your own personal act, which can only be acceptable to the great Head of the Church, in proportion as it arises from those pure and spiritual principles, which his gospel recommends ; supreme love to him as your great Lord, and affectionate attachment to his followers for his sake ; a grateful adoring sense of your obligations to him ; concern to obey all his will in the way which he himself has appointed ; love to his cause, and willingness to show your regard for his interest, and to seek its promotion.

If you enter upon the christian profession under the influence of these principles and in this spirit, the act will be approved by the great Redeemer ; and you will find it to be to your own soul, an important means of comfort and improvement in the divine life.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION AND THE ACT OF UNION WITH A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

It is to be regarded both as an injury to the churches of Christ in their collective capacity, and to the interests of the individual members of those churches, when the christian profession is entered upon without right views of its nature; what kind of engagement it is, and what kind of connection it forms. If you sincerely desire to know the will of your Lord, you will be anxious rightly to understand what it is that you are about to do in making an open profession of religion, and joining a Church of Christ.

Let me affectionately intreat your attention now, to some remarks on this point, while the act of confessing Christ before men is in your view.

1. It is a ~~most~~ solemn and weighty engagement, to which you are looking forward. The transactions of a creature with the infinite Creator; of a sinner with his exalted Saviour; must ever be of a solemn and momentous *character*. When in secret you bowed before

God, and presented yourself to him, and laid hold of his covenant, and consecrated yourself to his service ; there was a solemnity about such transactions, which could not attach to the highest engagements with the greatest of your fellow mortals. It was a feeble dependant creature, before his mighty Creator ; a rational and immortal being, applying to the fountains of life and immortality ; a fallen sinner, at the feet of a glorious and gracious Saviour ; a humble believer, resting on an atoning Redeemer. All the highest interests of the soul, for time and eternity, were involved in such a transaction. Heaven beheld it, though earth might be ignorant of it. On high it was recorded, and an indelible impression it has left on your heart and character. Solemn, momentous seasons ! Great, and important engagement !!

Now when you make an open profession of devotedness to God, you renew in public what you have thus attended to in private. You come to make the confession in the view of your fellow creatures, that you take the Lord to be your God, that you receive Christ as your Saviour, that you look to the Spirit as your sanctifier ; that you give up yourself to God to be entirely his, on the ground of the new covenant of his grace in Christ Jesus. You call heaven and earth, as it were, now to bear witness

4. Such an engagement must be of a permanent character, and have an abiding influence. Some persons when they have made a profession of Christianity, have at once seemed to sit down satisfied, as if their work were done : as if being now acknowledged christians, they aimed at nothing further. But whenever this is the case, it is a striking proof of a mournful want of the most distinguishing spirit of true christianity, which is, a continual aim at advancement and improvement. You are seriously to regard your entrance on the christian profession, your becoming united to a church of Christ, as only the beginning of that course, which is to continue and accelerate to the close of your life. And it is this continuance and increase, which will furnish the only full and satisfactory evidence of the genuineness of your christian character and hope. "If ye continue in my word," says the Saviour, "then are ye my disciples indeed." "Then are we made partakers of Christ," says his inspired servant, "if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." You may justly look upon yourself as a racer, who has just entered the lists, and set off at the starting point, having the whole course before him. So that now, "laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset you, you are to run with *patience* the race set before you, looking unto

Jesus the author and finisher of your faith." You may also view yourself as a soldier just entering the army, only putting on the armour to begin the warfare, having the whole conflict before you, which is only to close with death. Now you are to hear the great Captain of your Salvation, saying, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." "Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;" not giving up the contest till you can in some humble measure say, "I have fought the good fight: I have finished my course; I have kept the faith;" and now I am ready to be discharged from the warfare, and to be admitted among the victors through the grace of my Lord. You are to consider yourself as now having commenced a course of christian duty, which you are habitually to follow, even to the end of your days. You are to feel bound to go forward in the path of obedience, and to carry out the christian character through the whole of your life.

5. It is an engagement which is to have a *universal* influence. It is to extend over every part of your character; to every relation which you sustain; and to all the circumstances in which you may be placed. Many persons we have reason to fear, when they have made a

profession of christianity, have entertained very inadequate ideas of the extent of that influence which christianity is to have upon them. They see its connection with sacred duties, and sacred seasons ; but they are apt to overlook the influence which it should have over all other concerns, even the most common and the most secular. You are now to think when joining the church, “ I am making a profession of christianity ; I am to act as a christian professor in all things. I am habitually to conduct myself as one who professes to take the will of Christ as his great rule, and to aim at the glory of Christ as the grand end of life ; as one who has professed to renounce all carnal and selfish principles and pursuits ; dedicating all that I am and have to Christ my great Lord and Master. I am to be the christian then every where, and in every thing ; in the shop, in the field, in the family, in the world, in all my transactions with men, as well as in the closet and in the sanctuary. Religion is to influence my temper, my principles, my conduct in all things. I am to be concerned to feel, to think, to act, as a christian, having professed to take Christ as my model, my guide, and my ruler, to follow him in all things.” “ Whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.” “ *Do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto*

men." "Adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things." "Be diligent in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." Taking this view of the engagement into which you are entering, it may appear to you to be a great and formidable undertaking; and you may be ready to exclaim "who is sufficient for these things?" But you will not wish these statements to be lowered. You will not desire the claims of your Lord, or the standard of religious attainment that he has presented, to be brought down. Rather will you feel, that it is your duty, and must be your constant aim, to be, and to do, all that he requires, for the glory of his name, the honour of his cause, and the advancement of your christian character. Your dependance, at the same time, is to be placed on the grace of your God, to fit you increasingly for his service, to assist you in all your efforts to obey his will, to purify your spirit, and to inscribe on all your character and conduct, "holiness unto the Lord."

6. It is to be an unreserved engagement to the Saviour, i. e. you are to give up yourself with all that you have, openly to him. If you understand the nature of a personal dedication to Christ, with what was included in such an act, when you surrendered yourself in secret to him, you recognized this great principle, that he had a

supreme and a sole right, as your Redeemer and your Lord, to all that you possessed. You saw, you felt, and you confessed, that you were not your own; that you were no longer to live to yourself, or for any selfish purposes, but that it was both your duty and your privilege to be entirely the Lord's, to observe his will, to live to his glory.

The christian profession is an *open* avowal of this. When you become united to a church of Christ you in effect say, "I now, thus solemnly and openly, give up my whole self to the Lord; the powers of my mind to be consecrated to him; the members of my body to be employed in his service; my time, my property, my influence; all are his; from him I derive them all, by his mercy I have been possessed of them all, when I had forfeited every thing by my transgressions; so that I regard myself as called to give up all to him, to be employed just in that way which he requires, and by which his glory may be best promoted. I have nothing to call my own, in such a sense as to be at liberty to employ it for my own ease, or gratification, or aggrandizement, regardless of the will of him whom I profess to serve." To this extent you are required to go. Are you prepared for this full surrender; for this unreserved consecration to the Redeemer? If you are not ready for

this, you are not in a fit state to take upon you the christian profession. Hear what the Saviour says, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." "Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath he cannot be my disciple." Self is to be denied, the Saviour to be supreme. Every thing is to be given up at his call, and all that we have to be devoted to his glory. Constrained by the love of Christ, we are not to live unto ourselves, but unto him that died for us and rose again. Nothing is to be withheld. We are to make no reserve, but inquire in what way we may best subserve the designs of Christ, and promote his glory by all that we possess. If you feel really unwilling to do this, venture not to profess yourself on the Lord's side. If you think these requirements are too great, that the Saviour is not worthy of all this, or that you must be permitted to make some reserve for selfish purposes and carnal designs, then you are not in a right state to give yourself to the Church, for you have not rightly given yourselves to the Lord. Count the cost. Consider what is required. Remember the claims of the Redeemer. See whether he can receive less than your all; whether all does not rightfully belong to him. Then at once earnestly implore the aids of his grace to bring you to a full and cordial

acquiescence in all that he requires ; that you may feel that it is the highest, the best, the noblest use to which you can devote all that you possess ; and that then only are things rightly employed, when they are consecrated to the Lord alone.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE ADVANTAGES ATTENDING A CONNEXION WITH A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

THOSE who become united to a christian society generally anticipate the enjoyment of some important advantages, as the result of that connection ;—advantages which those are deprived of who refuse to enter into such a connection. Most true indeed, it is, that whatever duties the Saviour has enjoined upon us, are almost invariably attended with advantages of considerable value. As he has plainly made it a duty incumbent on his followers, to be associated together in christian communion ; so he calls forth thereby the social principles of our nature into most interesting and delightful exercise, and sanctifies them to the high and holy purposes of promoting our spiritual improvement and enjoyment.

1. One advantage that you will possess in this connection will be, united communion with your fellow christians at the table of the Lord. To commemorate the dying love of the Redeemer, by partaking of the instituted memorials of his death in the Lord's Supper with his people, you see clearly to be a duty to which you are

called. But while you feel bound by a sense of duty to observe this institution, you also regard it as a great privilege that you should be permitted to come to that table, to sit down at the feast of divine love, to engage with your fellow-christians mutually to celebrate the grace of your dying Lord ; partaking of one bread and drinking of one cup as being all one in Christ Jesus. *It is a great privilege ;* and when you are expecting first to enjoy this privilege, it is most desirable to have right views of its nature and value. You will not exalt it so high, as to turn it from its proper edifying use, to a superstitious and dangerous abuse. You will not regard it as a saving ordinance : not attach any mysterious efficacy to the bread and wine as there exhibited : not suppose that the mere act of eating of that bread, and drinking of that cup, can be in itself of any avail to your eternal safety. You will know that outward symbols and external acts, can be of value only as pointing to spiritual blessings, and as accompanied with spiritual graces. The view that you are to take of the Lord's Supper is, that it is an ordinance of *commemoration*, in which you are called to partake of bread and wine, as memorials of the Saviour's death, and are affectionately, *adoringly, gratefully, and believingly*, to remember *him, and what he has done and suffered for you,*

and what blessings he has obtained by his sacrifice on your behalf. "Do it all in remembrance of him." In this respect, you will regard it as a great privilege, to commemorate with the saints the sufferings and death of him to whom you owe all your hope, and from whom you expect the full salvation of your soul; there to attend as a humble disciple of his.

You may consider it also, as an ordinance of *dedication*. There you will be called to the privilege of a renewed consecration of yourself, in connection with your fellow christians, to the Redeemer. When partaking of the memorials of his grace, realizing him as present with you at his Table, you are to give yourselves to him in the way which he has appointed. Drawn by the cords of his love, constrained by the power of his grace and by the glories of his cross, there you are to feel that you are wholly and entirely the Lord's.

"Here Lord, I give myself away."

It may be regarded also as a *sealing* ordinance. You may look upon the memorials there presented as seals of the covenant of grace; confirming and shewing, the certainty of its blessings to believing souls. Partaking of them in the exercise of faith in that Redeemer, whose atonement is

there emblematically set forth, you may realize their security to yourself, and have your hope of the full enjoyment of the blessings of this covenant greatly strengthened.

If you approach the Table of the Lord, with a view to the commemoration of his sufferings and death, to realize his character and work, you will find it a happy and most important means of promoting your love to him ; warming your heart with the most devout and fervent affections towards such a Saviour. Looking also upon your fellow communicants as, in the judgment of charity, united to the same Lord, your heart may expand with kind and affectionate regards towards them. No seasons will be to you more delightful or profitable, than those in which your spirit glows with love to your Redeemer and his saints. This is a privilege which thousands have found to be an earnest and foretaste of heaven.

2. Another advantage to be enjoyed in connection with a christian church is, that of having a spiritual interest in the regard and attention of the pastor of the church. You value the privilege of a preached gospel. You have derived benefit from the ministry of divine truth. This you are ever to regard as an appointment of the great Head of the Church to promote your good. But a christian society, formed and *constituted* according to the will of Christ, has a

pastor appointed over it, who is not only to preach the truths of the gospel but to exercise a Shepherd's care, a watchful oversight, attending habitually to the spiritual interests of those who have chosen him to be their pastor. "He watches for souls." He will "take heed to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer, to feed the Church of God." "He studies rightly to divide the word of truth, that all may have a portion of meat in due season." While he habitually labours for the conversion of those that are *without*, he has a special regard to the improvement of those who are *within* the Church of Christ. You will not regard this as a small privilege, to have the eye of a kind and faithful pastor over you; to share his pious attentions; to be borne on his heart before the throne of mercy; to have him acquainted with your spiritual condition, and ministering to your wants; aiming continually at your improvement in connection with that of your fellow members. When he sees that you need the warnings of divine truth, it will be your interest as well as your duty attentively to receive them from his lips. When he sees you in trial, needing the consolations of the gospel, you may gratefully receive what he administers. If he observes you declining in your course, and presents the arousing and quickening messages

of the word, you may thankfully receive, and be abundantly benefited by them.

“ And as a bird each fond endearment tries,
To tempt its new fledg'd offspring to the skies ;
He'll try each art, reprove each dull delay
Allure to brighter worlds, and lead the way.”

If you see anything important in this, you will be aware that a considerable advantage is to be derived from union with a Church, under the care of a devoted pastor ; whom you may look upon as the minister of Christ for your good ; while you may be his “joy, and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

3. Another advantage attending this connection is, that by it you will be brought to look upon yourself as more fully separated from the world, so that you may be more guarded against its dangers. When a person who has become privately devoted to the Redeemer, or who is attending in secret to his spiritual welfare, keeps back from an open profession of faith in Christ, he is in danger of feeling, thinking, and acting, as if he were free from some kind of restraint, which the members of a Church are brought under. When placed in difficult circumstances, he may be tempted to conceal his character, if not to act inconsistently with it, by the thought, “*why I have not made a profession; I am not a*

member of the Church, therefore so much is not expected from me." Thus he lies more open to temptation and feels himself not so completely separated from the world.

Now if you become united to a christian society, you will feel that you have actually, and openly, come out from the world, and are expected to be "separate, and not to touch the unclean thing." You will feel that you have taken an important step, that you openly bear the character of a decided follower of Christ; that you have a character to maintain as a christian; that you have a cause to support, a profession to honour; that you are now to act as a Soldier of Christ, a follower of the Lamb.

Great advantages may be found to result from this as a means of preserving you in the hour of temptation, of keeping you from scenes of danger, and of leading you to act with firmness and decision. It is calculated to give an energy and vigour to your character, which may prove to be of unspeakable importance. To have to think, "the eyes of the world are now upon me, all are now observing me, Oh should I not be deeply concerned to walk worthy of that holy vocation wherewith I profess to be called! To 'walk in wisdom towards those that are without!' To manifest the influence of christianity, to breathe its spirit, to act on its principles, to

conform to its precepts ! As I now openly bear the name, let me manifest habitually the character of the christian." You will find that you need every motive, and every bond, that may act upon your spirit, and tend to hold your feet to the path of christian duty ; and whatever has this effect will prove a real advantage to you.

4. The sympathy and assistance of your christian brethren in your spiritual course, will be another benefit connected with your union to the Church. A christian society should ever be a sacred brotherhood, a fraternal bond ; all affectionately concerned for the welfare of one another ; willing to do all in their power to promote their mutual good, in connection with the glory of their God. If you become united to such a society you will enjoy the great privilege of the fellowship of the saints. You will meet with them as one of their number ; uniting with them in the house of God, at the Table of the Lord, in seasons of social prayer and christian converse ; while you share their sympathy, and experience their kind concern for your good. They, looking upon you as a brother or sister in Christ Jesus, will surely have some affectionate regard to your spiritual improvement and comfort. Associating with them as fellow members of the same christian community, in the spirit of *genuine piety*, you will find such an association a

valuable aid to you in your heavenward journey. Their counsels may guide you in seasons of perplexity ; their prayers may assist your devotions ; their experience may be a spur to you ; and the deficiencies, backslidings or dangers, that may have appeared in them, may be presented as beacons to warn you. When you find yourself united with other christians as with a sacred band, this will give a vigour to your spirit, a firmness to your character, an energy to your course, which you might not otherwise possess. You will find that union is strength, that "two are better than one, and that a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

5. Another advantage attending this decisive step is, that it will be followed by satisfaction of mind, arising from a consciousness of being found in the path of duty, of having in this way conformed to the will of your Lord.

Whenever there is a prevailing consciousness of being really deficient in some great branch of duty ; that something positively enjoined is really neglected, there must be an uneasiness of spirit, a dissatisfaction, impairing the comfort, and depressing the hope of the mind. This we apprehend, is very much the case with some sincere christians, who have not openly professed their attachment to Christ. While they remain in a state of separation from a christian Church,

and never commemorate the Saviour's love at his Table, and have not espoused his interest in a public manner, they are not satisfied and they ought not to be ; they feel that there is something wanting; that they have not testified their love to Christ by obedience to all his commands ; that they have not confessed him before men in the way which he requires ; their minds have at times some considerable degree of uneasiness on the subject ; their course is uncomfortable ; their path impeded : their prospects beclouded. Hence, one great advantage of attending with full decision to this part of christian duty is, that it frees the mind from this uncomfortable state ; it brings some satisfaction and peace to the heart to which you might have been a stranger. Feeling an inward consciousness that you are not ashamed of Christ ; that you are confessing him before men ; that you are attending to his ordinances according to his appointment, obeying his dying command, giving this proof of love to him, that you obey his will, and are united with his followers, you will go on with more satisfaction and peace in his ways. A greater enjoyment also of the Saviour's presence may be expected, when you are remembering him in his ways. Receiving richer tokens of his love ; being strengthened by the more abundant supplies of his grace ; you will go forward with

greater delight in the ways of your God, to the glory of his name.

6. In attending on the ordinances of the Church on earth you will sometimes receive a foretaste of heaven, and will under these means be training and meetening for the services and enjoyments of the church above. It is a truth that should ever be remembered, that the church on earth is to be a nursery for heaven. There the children of God are born ; and there they are to be trained for the heavenly inheritance. There the trees of righteousness are planted : and there they are to grow, that they may at length be removed to flourish in the paradise of God. When you are united with a church of Christ, in proportion as you enter into the spirit of its duties and privileges, love divine ordinances, and attend rightly upon them, you will find your soul at some seasons so refreshed, enlivened, and profited, as to give you some foretaste of the bliss and purity above, and to be to you an earnest of the final eternal enjoyment of that state. You will say in the language of the Apostle, when you are commemorating the love of your exalted Saviour, " Whom having not seen we love ; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Yes,

“ And when we taste his love,
Our joys divinely grow,
Unspeakable, like those above
And heaven begins below.”

A regular attendance on these institutions in the exercise of a right spirit, will promote your spiritual improvement; call into exercise, strengthen, and advance the growth of christian graces: so that you will be meetening for the higher, nobler, sublimer, services of the church above. If here you have your heart tuned to the Redeemer's praise, it will fit you for the state where that praise is perfect. Here you will realize him by faith, and approach near to him in his ordinances, and thus be preparing for the world where you are to see him as he is, and to be ever with him. Here indeed you will “see through a glass darkly, but there face to face: here you will know but in part, there you will know, even as also you are known.” But still, the *one* will be the means of fitting the mind to enjoy the fulness and glory of the *other*; and of leading it to aspire more ardently after the possession of perfect purity and bliss.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE DUTIES CONNECTED WITH CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

EVERY new relation into which we enter, brings with it some duties peculiar to that relation ; and when we form new connections, we lay ourselves under some special obligations to those with whom we become connected. This must be the case with those who become united to a christian church. Though the general duties of the christian life are the same in all situations, consisting in the various exercises of love to God and man, with all the practices to which they lead ; yet, there are some duties peculiar to the state of church members, arising out of that relation ; and by a voluntary union to a christian Society, persons should consider themselves obliged, to attend to all the duties which such a union may include or require, in order to answer the great purpose for which it is formed.

My object in this chapter is plainly and faithfully to point out those duties ; to show you what may reasonably be expected of you ; and earnestly to press these duties on your regard.

1. That Christian Society to which you become united, is to be looked upon as your home in a spiritual sense, where you are to abide, and from which you are not needlessly to roam. As home has charms which no other place can boast; and as he who has no home but is an unsettled wanderer, is ever regarded by us as in an unhappy condition; so those, who have no place which they view in the light of a home in sacred things, where they may rest and abide, are in a lamentable state. Now by the act of joining a christian church, you intimate that there you have found a home; that there you intend to abide. You wish to be received as a member of that family; to place yourself under their pastor as your spiritual parent or guide; to sit down at the table as one belonging to them. You virtually say,

“Here would I find a settled rest,
While others go and come :
No more a stranger, or a guest,
But like a child at home.”

You are ever then to guard against a roving disposition. You are not to wander from one assembly to another; not to be drawn by motives of mere curiosity from your stated place; not to *suffer the attraction* of new names, or new places,

or new circumstances, to draw you away from your own place, and your own pastor. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is the man that wanders from his place." I do not mean, that there may not be sufficient reasons presented at some seasons, for your worshipping in another place, and hearing another minister of Christ ; but that it would be improper to do this frequently, or on every new occasion that may offer. Neither do I mean that you are not to sit down at the Lord's table with another church on any occasion, when a suitable opportunity is presented, for this may be both pleasant and profitable. Nor do I mean that you are never in the course of your life to have any other home than this to to which you first belong ; for you may in future days be placed by providence at such a distance from the society you first joined as to have no opportunity to commune with them ; and then it will become your duty to be united with another church, that you may enjoy the the same privileges in another department of Zion. But wherever you become statedly resident, there seek a place in a church of Christ, where you may rest and abide ; where your spiritual interests may be permanently advanced.

2. Another duty in such a relation is, that there should be a regular attendance on all the means of improvement that are afforded in the

Society to which you are united. It is a beautiful description of the early state of the Church at Jerusalem that is given in the Acts of the Apostles that "they continued stedfastly, in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship; and in breaking of bread, and in prayers;" shewing a constant, steady attention, to all the means of spiritual improvement that were presented to them, in the Society with which they had become connected. We have seen some, who have discovered a very commendable degree of zeal and diligence at the commencement of their christian profession, but have soon declined in the regularity of their attendance on sacred services; suffering slight excuses to prevail, and a spirit of negligence to be indulged. Such have given occasion to the enquiry: "where is the blessedness ye spake of? Where the enjoyment of seasons for improvement ye once spake of? Where is the zeal and vigour ye once discovered? Where the devotedness of heart ye once appeared to manifest? Ye did run well who did hinder you? Why is your place now so often empty? Why the seasons for social prayer, for christian communion, so often neglected?" These are fearful indications of a backsliding state.

Be it your concern, dear reader, always to *fill your place* in the Church, whenever you

are not really prevented by providential circumstances. Let the public means of grace be steadily, and unceasingly regarded. Let the Table of the Lord never be neglected. Let the opportunities for social prayer be seriously observed ; and any other returning seasons for christian intercourse, and mutual improvement, be habitually attended. As a member of the Society you are to seek your own spiritual benefit, and the benefit of your fellow members, by a diligent, pious, and prayerful observance of these various means. Thus you will strengthen each others hands, and encourage each others hearts ; thus you will sustain and animate your pastor, in his labours for your good. Thus you will "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promises." "And consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works : not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

3. Another duty is, ever to strive to promote the peace of the Society of which you are a member. It is a christian's duty "if it be possible, as much as lieth in him, to live peaceably with all men." Surely then, it must be incumbent upon him, to exercise a peaceable

disposition, and to show the influence of a peaceful spirit, in the church to which he belongs. Numerous are the statements, and impressive the precepts, in the word of God, which shew the importance of this. Christianity is the religion of peace and love. Therein God is revealed as the "God of peace." Christ as the "prince of peace." The Holy Spirit as the peaceful dove. There the blessing is pronounced upon the "peacemakers for they shall be called the Sons of God." There "peace on earth, and good will to men, are proclaimed in connection with glory to God in the highest." There christians are exhorted to "be at peace among themselves;" to "live in peace, that the God of love and peace may be with them." "Peace be with you," is the frequent benediction of the Gospel. "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the band of peace." Follow after peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." "Seek peace, and pursue it." If you see any thing arise which is likely to break in upon the harmony of the church, watch and pray against it. Be deeply concerned that no root of bitterness may spring up and trouble, whereby many may be defiled. If the blessing of peace seems about to depart, rise up, and pursue it, follow after, and strive to retain it. *Manifest a conciliatory spirit. Exercise a mild,*

gentle, kind and forgiving disposition. Never willingly give offence to your fellow christians. Be always backward to take offence. When offences do arise, adopt prudent and scriptural means for reconciliation. Do not expect too much from your fellow christians. Be willing to bear with their failings, as they will have to bear with yours. Never be imperious and overbearing and self willed, in your conduct in the church. Let your spirit and deportment be marked by the humility, and the love, which the gospel inculcates. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you ; with all malice ; and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." If religion prosper, O ever remember that it must be in the region of peace and love ; these are the elements in which it delights. If contentions and discord prevail, the spirit of religion is lost.

" The Spirit like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the realms of noise and strife ; "

while he abides and reigns, peace and love prevail. The cultivation of this temper will advance

your own happiness ; will promote the comfort of your pastor and of your fellow christians ; engage the blessing of God upon you ; and recommend religion to the world around you. O if this spirit had its full influence, what happiness would be found in the churches of Christ ! Then many would exclaim, " Behold ! how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity."

4. It will be your duty to take a lively interest in the prosperity and increase of the Church with which you become connected. The principles of the gospel require that a christian should not live for himself, but for the glory of his Lord, and for the good of his fellow creatures. It will be incumbent upon you as a christian professor, to cultivate large and extended desires for the promotion of the kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of men ; and then in perfect consistency with this, to pay a special attention to the interests of the church, to which you are united. This forms the sphere in which your spiritual influence is more immediately to be felt ; this the circle in which you are to move. Here you are to manifest a deep concern for the prosperity of that part of the Zion of the Holy One of Israel where you are located. You are to cultivate a fervent solicitude that God would "*make it*, and the places round about his hill a

blessing; that the shower may come down in its season, that there may be showers of blessings;" that the dews of heaven may descend on all its ordinances; that all your fellow members may prosper in the things of God; that the church may increase "with all the increase of God." Cultivate the spirit of the psalmist, when he said, "pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions sakes, I will now say, peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good." Take a deep interest in the welfare of Zion.

If you see any among your fellow-members backsliding, seek their restoration; any in peculiar danger, watch over them, and if you can, kindly and faithfully warn them. If any are in sorrow sympathize with them, and implore a blessing to attend their trials. If you see any rejoicing in God their Saviour, rejoice with them. When you are attending under the ministry of divine truth, observe any that are impressed thereby, and try to aid and strengthen their impressions. When you see any enquiring the way to salvation, endeavour rightly to direct them. Plead for, and watch for, and hope for, the divine blessing on the word of truth in its public

administrations. Let it be your heart's desire and prayer to God for those around you that they may be saved. Attend all the meetings of the church for the regulation of its spiritual affairs; when members are to be admitted; and when discipline is to be administered. Let all its real interests lie near your heart. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning."

5. Let the pastor of the church be regarded by you in a manner corresponding to his character and his office. If you look upon your minister as an under shepherd, placed over you by the chief shepherd of the sheep, you will feel it to be your duty to attend upon his ministrations with a serious, diligent, teachable, and obedient mind. You will submit to him as the guide of the Church, under its Great Head. While he labours for your spiritual benefit, you are "to esteem him very highly in love for his works sake." Always attend on his ministrations with a view to your improvement in divine knowledge, and in all the principles of the divine life. Be willing that he should lead you to a further and yet further acquaintance with the various truths of divine revelation. It will greatly encourage him to see you anxious to be led into all the will of God. It is your duty especially to pray for *your pastor*. While all the faithful ministers of

God are to be remembered in your supplications, your own pastor is to have a particular interest in your addresses at the mercy seat. Do not forget him in secret, when you there draw near to your heavenly Father. Do not forget him at the family altar, when you bow in the domestic circle before the God of the families of Israel. Do not forget him at the social prayer meeting, where the united supplications of the Church are to be presented before the God of Zion. Let your minister hear your affectionate, fervent, pleadings with God when he attends with you at the social season, on his behalf: it will greatly cheer his spirit, and animate him to go forward with fresh vigour in his arduous work. Apostles entreated the prayers of the Churches; they said, "Brethren pray for us." How much more must the ordinary ministers of the gospel need the help of your prayers. This they require on account of the greatness of their work; the peculiar difficulties and discouragements that attend it; and its utter inefficiency without the divine blessing; while your prayers for your pastor will return into your own bosom; and the more abundantly he is blest in his labours in answer to your supplications, the more will your souls be benefited, by a suitable attendance on his ministry.

It is your duty also to be willing to aid according to your ability in the support of the pastor

who is placed over you. "So hath God ordained, that they which preach the gospel, should live of the gospel." "And if they have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if they shall reap your carnal things?" If you rightly view the case, you will be ready most cheerfully to assist according to your means, in securing the temporal support and comfort of the minister, whose life is devoted to the promotion of your spiritual improvement.

6. It will be especially incumbent upon you as a member of a christian church, to cultivate every grace, and to practice every duty, that may honour and adorn your profession. The eyes of the world will be upon you: with an eagle glance the ungodly will be watching your conduct, eager to pounce upon any thing that may bring discredit on the religion you profess. They will watch your temper, your words, and your actions. They will be looking for a kind of ideal perfection, which can scarcely be exhibited in this world. But let this only stimulate you to be the more circumspect in your conduct; and to aim at more full consistency in your whole character. Ever remember, that the honour of your Lord, the credit of religion, the comfort of your christian connections, the encouragement of inquirers, the peace and improvement of your own mind, *are all connected with the consistency of your*

spirit and conduct with the religion you profess. Let the injunctions of inspired truth on this subject sink deep into your heart. "Let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven." "Adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things." "Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise." Observe the fervent intreaties of inspired men upon this subject. "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation with which ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness." "Ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory." Cultivate assiduously the temper of christianity; meekness, humility, gentleness, love, kindness, candour, forbearance, forgiveness, compassion. Act steadily on the principles of christianity; purity, truth, integrity, honour, uprightness in all things. Practice all the various duties of christianity. Let it appear that "the grace of God which bringeth Salvation, has taught you to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world." These things will most effectually stop the mouths of gainsayers; silence many of the objections

of infidels ; put to shame the enemies of the cause ; aid the interests of religion ; recommend christianity to those around you ; allure the young to attend to the things of God : and encourage the thoughtful. By all that you owe to your blessed Redeemer, I entreat you ever to recommend his religion by the purity and loveliness of your spirit and conduct.

7. Another duty is to hold fast the great principles of the christian faith. Observe the language of divine truth on this point ; " Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." " Strive earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." " Striving together for the faith of the gospel." Let the distinguishing truths of the gospel be ever dear to your heart. Let the doctrines relating to the person, work, and offices of the Redeemer ; and also those relating to the blessed Spirit of all grace, as they are revealed in the gospel, be correctly understood, highly prized, and stedfastly maintained. If you have felt the value of the atoning sacrifice of the Saviour ; the importance of the righteousness of the Son of God to justify your soul ; the worth of his intercession with God on your behalf : if you have realized the value of the influences of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify the heart ; truths which glorify the *grace and the holiness of God*, which humble

the pride and subdue the depravity of man, which exert a peaceful and purifying influence over his whole character; then, let nothing cause you to swerve from them. Let your faith in the great principles of the gospel be well grounded, resting on the testimony of God. Be concerned that your knowledge of them may be clear and consistent, experimental and practical. Strive to have just and distinct ideas on divine subjects. "Increasing in the knowledge of God." Seek to be established in the evidence of the truths you believe as presented in the Bible. Observe their use and importance in the divine life; and then you will not be easily drawn to desert, or to give them up, whatever their adversaries may have to urge against them. The more you know of them, according to their real nature and influence, the more you will prize them, the more ardently will you cleave to them, and you will never let them go. They will appear to you like the life blood of the christian system; essential to the spiritual life; promoting the healthful state of the character; all connected with the hope, the peace, the improvement, and the purity of the soul.

8. You are humbly to receive the admonitions of the church, if you ever should be so unhappy as to need them.

The members of a christian society are required to watch over one another in the spirit of christian love; to admonish, to exhort one another; to warn the unruly, as well as to comfort the feeble minded. While then it must be your earnest endeavour to walk worthy of your holy vocation; to give no occasion for the church to be grieved, the weak to stumble, or the world to triumph; yet if you ever should be forgetful of the high claims of the christian profession; if you should become neglectful of the duties to which you are called; if you should fall into the indulgence of an unchristian spirit and temper; if you should be ensnared by a love of the world; if you should dishonour the christian profession by any open sin; and if under any such circumstances your christian brethren should kindly but faithfully admonish you; it will be your duty to receive the admonition in a spirit of humility, to be thankful for it, and to seek to profit thereby. Imitate the temper of David when he said, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head; for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." If such unhappy circumstances should arise, that you should be brought under the discipline of the church with which you become *connected*, it will be incumbent upon you to re-

ceive with meekness the admonitions they may communicate ; to hearken to them ; to submit to their decisions ; to search into your case, and be concerned to be rescued from the influence of that spirit, or from the evils of that line of conduct, which appear to your christian brethren to be injurious to your own soul, as well as to the interests of the Church of Christ. You will shudder at the thought, I trust, of ever sinking so low, or of falling into such sins, as shall subject you to the most painful act the church of Christ can perform, viz, exclusion from her communion, the act of excommunication. Oh ! it is a solemn an awful, a distressing act, to cut off a member from the body of the faithful ; and should never be performed until any of her professed members appear to have cut themselves off from Christ and his cause. "Be not high minded, but fear." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Walk circumspectly not as fools, but as wise." Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." That you may not be "of them that draw back unto perdition ; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

9. Aim at usefulness in the cause of Christ, and in connection with his church. In the early periods of the christian life, there is generally felt some deep concern to be useful to others ; a

willingness to do any thing that can be done to be a blessing to others; to lead others to the great Redeemer. This is a right feeling. Though in some young disciples, zeal has outstript knowledge and prudence, yet the zeal was right, for "it is good always, to be zealously affected in a good thing." It is right to be concerned after usefulness, to be anxious to be the means of converting sinners, and of guiding them to the Saviour. When this is attended with a suitable knowledge of divine things; with a proper estimate of the talents and means possessed, and a discreet use of them; it is of great value, and will be attended with great advantage to the individual and to others also. But some professing christians, after having entered into the church, have lost their zeal and their concern to be useful to others. Many have declined in their fervour and devotedness, and manifested at length very little concern for the glory of the Saviour, and for the salvation of sinners. Such have given occasion for the application to them of the language of Christ to the church at Ephesus, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do thy first works." Let it ever be borne in mind, that a declining state of *love, and zeal, and devotedness*, is offensive to

the Redeemer. When you have entered into a visible connection with his church, have professed his name, are partakers with his people of all the privileges of christian fellowship, and are favoured with the best advantages for improving in an acquaintance with the great things of the gospel, your zeal and love should increase, if not in the fervency of feeling, yet in depth, in solidity, in steadiness, in constancy. Never should you lose sight of this as one grand object of your course as christians, that you are to aim to be useful in the cause of God, You "are to live not to yourself, but to him that died for you and rose again." "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord, whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lords." "Christ is to be magnified in us, whether it be by life or by death." "For us to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Employ every talent you have for him. Adopt every suitable means that you can devise, whereby you may be useful to others. There are the young to be instructed; there are the ignorant to be enlightened; there are the inquirers to be directed and encouraged; there are the wanderers to be sought after and reclaimed; the careless and profane to be pitied and prayed for. There are the ministrations of divine

“ If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” When contemplating his excellencies, can you forbear to say ?

“ Such love and meekness so divine,
I would transcribe and make them mine.
Be thou my pattern, make me bear.
More of thy gracious image here.”

By aiming high, you will attain the more ; and thus you will experience the power, enjoy the comforts, manifest the reality, and display the excellency, of real religion. At the same time, the higher the standard is, at which you aim to be conformed, the lower you will lie in your own eyes, under a sense of your great deficiencies : and your entire dependance will be placed on the grace of your God through Jesus Christ. But if you ever satisfy yourself with low attainments in religion ; if you just wish to be safe, and that is all at which you aim ; if you desire to have only just enough religion to bring you to heaven ; satisfied if you may but just get in ; waiting to know just the lowest point of safety ; then you have no right to enter the church of Christ ; this is not the spirit of christianity ; this is not the effect of divine grace. You will never reach to heaven at all in this *state of mind*. You will only disgrace the cause

of Christ, if you become connected with his church. A right view of the christian state and character, will shew to you the importance of going forward in the ways of God. And oh let it be your habitual aim, to make great advances in the divine life and likeness. The more you realize your obligations to the Saviour, the more you will feel concerned to bear his image, and to rise to higher degrees of conformity to his holy will. "Real grace," says Mr. James, "is ever seeking after increase; and any approach to a contentment with what you have, is a proof that you have none. You must grow; it is your solemn duty. God demands it; your happiness and safety require it."

CHAPTER V.

ADDRESSES TO DIFFERENT CLASSES OF CANDIDATES FOR COMMUNION.

THE age of candidates ; the relations they sustain ; the circumstances in which they are placed ; all present something distinct, if not peculiar, that call for some remarks, as to the advantages or disadvantages : the dangers and the duties of the different classes of such.

1. I address the *young* candidate for the fellowship of the Church. An early period of life, is not to be considered as presenting any barrier to your entrance into the church of Christ by a profession of his name ; if you are capable of understanding the essential truths of his gospel ; and of performing the duties which it enjoins. If you have been early brought to the Saviour ; whether it have been by a divine blessing on parental instruction, piety, and prayer, or on the ministry which you have attended, or on any other means which may have been employed for your good ; so that your mind has been enlightened and impressed with the great truths of religion ; and you have yielded yourself to the Redeemer, and have become

unreservedly devoted to him ; and now see it to be your duty to appear for him in his church ; to show your attachment to his cause ; to receive the memorials of his grace, and to be enrolled amongst his followers ; we hail your early decision with delight. It is a great blessing to be early delivered from the snares of vice, to walk in the paths of true piety, to be devoted to the Saviour, who looks upon the young with peculiar regard. He as the gracious shepherd of the flock, "gathers the Lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom." He commands his ministers to "feed his lambs." He ever showed a kind regard to the young ; and he will welcome you to his table, and to all the privileges of his grace. Your heart may well glow with lively affection, and grateful admiration, when you think of being openly united to his church. But seeing you have the advantage of entering the church while you are young, you are especially called upon to enter it, as a humble learner in the school of Christ. Remembering your remaining ignorance, your weakness and insufficiency, your liability to err and to wander ; you are committing yourself to the care of the great Shepherd, humbly to attend to the instructions of your pastor, and to the advice and guidance of those who are your seniors in the christian life. Cultivate a teachable

spirit ; you will find as you go on that you have much to learn, and much to attain in the divine life, requiring all the vigour of your future days, and all the devotedness of your mind, and all the aids that the church of God affords, and that the grace of the Redeemer imparts. It is important that you should possess such a spirit of holy zeal, as will lead you habitually to aim to be a blessing to others, and to be useful in those various ways that may be suited to your age and capacity. But here, I would caution you against an error, which I am afraid is becoming prevalent amongst the young in our churches, i. e. of being so much employed in attending to others, as to neglect the means of personal improvement. You cannot be lastingly useful, or honourable, or happy, in your christian course, unless you are attentive to the means of personal improvement in the things of God ; storing your own minds with heavenly truth ; attending habitually to the instructive ministrations of your own pastor ; reading such books as are of sterling value ; increasing in divine knowledge ; having "the word of Christ dwelling in you richly, in all wisdom." If amidst the ardour of youthful zeal you are always actively engaged on the behalf of others, while these things are neglected, your spiritual improvement and *permanent* usefulness will be greatly hindered.

Exercise a humble and self diffident spirit, in your connection with the church. Pay a respectful regard to those who are farther advanced in years and experience. If they should not appear to be so vigorous, and active, and lively, and useful, as you may desire, look at the solid, sterling qualities they may possess, and let them see that you are willing to listen and to learn. Should you be dwelling in the house of your parents, "shew piety at home." Let your temper and conduct, in your daily domestic intercourse, recommend the religion you profess to those of your relatives that may be strangers to its influence. Should you be placed in other families, at a distance from the parental roof, be concerned to act with all the discretion and prudence, with all the diligence and integrity, with all the kindness and consistency, which may shew that religion has a most decisive and happy influence upon you, leading you to attend to every duty of life in a suitable manner. Thus you may even in the humblest station, "adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things."

2. I address the *parent*, who may be a candidate for the fellowship of the church. If you did not become decided for the service of God, before you had entered into the cares of domestic life, nor until you were surrounded with

rising family, you probably will feel some humbling and painful regrets, that the morning of life should have passed by, and its favourable opportunities have been lost, in a disregard to the "one thing needful." Those seasons cannot now be recalled; they are gone for ever. You must endeavour, therefore, to make the most of the advantages that yet remain; and to rise above the difficulties that may now attend your course.

The relation in which you stand as a parent, is a most important one. In entering into the church of Christ, it becomes you to realize the nature of that relation, and the important duties that it includes. The church expects, and the world will expect too, that the family of a christian professor should be trained and instructed and governed in a different manner to the families of the thoughtless and ungodly. You must endeavour to have your house in such order, that it may cause no reproach to be brought on the religion you profess. Your house should be as a nursery for the church of God; while the church is as a nursery for heaven. You are to have an altar for God in your family; resembling the patriarchs, who wherever they pitched their tents, built an altar to the Lord. Daily prayer and praise is to be presented there, before "the God of all the families of Israel." "Train up *your children* in the way in which they should

go, that when old they may not depart from it." "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." You are to instruct them in the things of God. Plainly, affectionately, frequently talk with them on the truths of God's word. See that they are regular in attending at the house of God, and on the means of grace. Inquire of them what they remember, and what they understand of the word they hear, and the services on which they attend. Begin early to train them aright, before they become stubborn and rebellious under your hand. Let none be able to point to the low, ignorant, ungovernable state of your children, as a disgrace to the religion of their parents.

If there be a proper attention paid to these duties of the domestic relation, there will be a manifest blessing resting on the families of God's people. You will find, that God does to a great degree own and bless the efforts of his servants, for the welfare of their children; you may have the happiness of beholding some of them come to be united to the church of God on earth; and you may meet them at last in your Father's house above, with all the family of God. When you give yourself to the church of Christ, then say with Joshua, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;" and with David, "With thy blessing, let the house of thy servant be

blessed for ever." "May they be a seed to serve God, accounted to the Lord for a generation." Let it be said of you as of Abraham, "He will command his children, and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord." To have the families of christian professors brought up for God, so that the children of the saints, who are the special hope of the church, may not disappoint that hope ; but that one may come and say, "I am the Lord's, and another subscribe with his hand unto the Lord," that they may be comforts to their parents, and blessings in the church, is of the greatest moment.

3. I would address the *aged* candidate. And is it not until nearly the latter end of your course, my aged friend, that you have been brought to yield yourself to God, and now with tottering steps, almost bending under the weight of years, are you approaching towards the table of the Lord, there to consecrate yourself openly to God ? Alas ! you mourn to think of the many days and years that have been spent at a distance from God ; and of the few that may yet remain to be employed for him. You are ready to envy the subjects of early piety, who have no such painful regrets to feel ; who have avoided so many evils into which you have fallen ; who have not had the bad habits to break through *which you have contracted* ; and who have en-

joyed so much better opportunities to serve God than any that you can now look for on earth. But amidst all the causes that you have for humiliation and sorrow, you will see, that still you have the most abundant cause for gratitude and love, that you were not given up to hardness and insensibility of heart, and left to pursue the ways of sin until death arrested you, and hell opened to receive you. Admiration and praise must rise from your inmost soul while you think, of the forbearance of God with you, his long-suffering towards you, and of the distinguishing grace that you have at length experienced. Surely, your language when entering the church of Christ must be, "Oh to grace how great a debtor!" "What shall I render to the Lord for the benefits he has bestowed upon me?" When you come to sit down to receive the memorials of the dying love of your Lord; to enjoy the communion of the saints with the hope of the full possession of salvation at last; you must feel that your few remaining days should be spent with the most entire and unreserved devotedness to the Saviour; that you should with all the remaining energy of your hearts, attend to the realities of eternity; that you should lose no season that may yet be granted, to promote your good, and the glory of God. While you must deeply feel that your entire dependence is

on the free and sovereign grace of God as the source of your salvation ; on the work of Christ as the foundation of your hope ; on the blessed Spirit as your gracious sanctifier ; you will also see that you are called upon with peculiar solemnity to walk with all humility and prayerfulness, with all diligence and watchfulness, while you remain in this fleeting world. With peculiar ardour you must long, that the remainder of your short uncertain life may not pass in vain, but may be spent so as to bring some glory to God, and be of some service in his church, and of some use to your fellow creatures. While you are attending to the improvement of your own soul in divine knowledge, and in the exercise of spiritual graces, encourage the young to devote themselves while they are young to God. Tell them, as the result of your own experience what an evil it will be to squander their early years in folly and sin ; how important to guard against procrastination in the concerns of religion. Thus you may still be a blessing, notwithstanding all the disadvantages under which you labour ; you may be useful to others, as well as secure the welfare of your own soul. And thus your " hoary head will become a crown of glory, now it is found in the way of righteousness."

4. *The candidate for christian fellowship who is rich in this world, or who is placed in circum-*

stances, of *earthly prosperity* may be distinctly addressed. An abundance of the good things of this world, often proves a snare to the soul, by drawing off the attention from the life to come; absorbing the thoughts and engaging the affections of the heart, presenting so many enticing, fascinating objects to view, as to lead the possessor to feel as if his happiness could be secured by them. Hence our Lord said "how hardly shall they that have riches, enter into the kingdom of God." If you have been taught to feel the vanity of the world; to see the evil and danger of a state of alienation from God; to know the essential necessity of having a portion beyond what earth can afford for the happiness of the soul; to feel the value of the blessings of the gospel salvation; the glory of the Saviour's love; prizing him above the highest good that earth can afford; "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ your Lord, that you may win Christ, and be found in him;" so that you consecrate yourself and all that you have to his service; you have reason to enter the church of God with lively gratitude, as a trophy of divine grace, called to shew forth the praises of the Lord.

Now, you are to consider that you come into a state of connection with the church, as a member of the household of faith; and that though

the distinctions and usages of civil society are not destroyed in the church, yet at the table of the Lord, and in the communion of the saints "the rich and poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all," and Christ is the Saviour of them all. They are all redeemed by the same precious blood; sanctified by the same spirit of God; and heirs of the same glorious inheritance above. There you will lay aside all affectation of superiority; you will not attempt to reign over your poorer brethren by any power that your property can give. Whatever influence you may attain, you will be concerned to use it in the spirit of humility and fervent piety, for the good of the church, and for the glory of God. As you have greater means of usefulness in supporting the cause of God by pecuniary aid; in assisting the poor of the flock; in kindly administering to the necessities of the afflicted or distressed, that may be around you; so by your christian profession, you are to consider yourselves as laid under peculiar obligations, to employ all that you have in that way that shall be most in accordance with the will of God. Those that are rich in this world are to be exhorted, "not to be highminded; nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy. To do good; to be rich in good works; ready to distribute; willing to communi-

cate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come; that they may lay hold of eternal life." Guard against those peculiar temptations to which your circumstances most expose you. Cultivate with the greatest assiduity those graces which are most in danger of being neglected. Watch against pride, and arrogance, and censoriousness, and an overbearing spirit; and cultivate humility, meekness, charitableness, and a kind attention to the state of others. Then your influence may be of a most profitable and happy character in that church of Christ with which you become connected.

5. To such as are *poor* in this world, who are about to enter a church of Christ, a few sentences suited to their circumstances may be addressed. Though you, my friend, may have been born and brought up in the humblest walks of life; and though you may have had but few advantages for the cultivation of your mind; yet you have been brought under the sound of the gospel, which, altogether unlike the systems of ancient philosophy, and many of the efforts of modern genius, pays a particular attention to the poor in this world. Its great author said, "To the poor the gospel is preached." His inspired servant said, "Hearken my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this

world ; rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him." If you then have by faith received this gospel, all its consolations and blessings are open to you, and the glories of the crown of life which it promises are set before you. Now, as you desire to be united with a church of Christ, all its privileges are open unto you. To a place at the table of the Lord you are welcome. There the communion of saints you may enjoy. All the provisions of God's house are set before you, and there you may "go in and out and find pasture." You have reason to rejoice in the spiritual privileges to which you are admitted through the grace of the Redeemer. When you enter the church, while you gratefully and joyfully avail yourself of its privileges, you will be concerned to act with humility and meekness, filling up your place with a view to your spiritual benefit, and the glory of God ; seeking to exercise submission and contentment under the trials to which your lot in life may expose you, diligently attending to the duties of your station, trusting in the care of a kind providence ; committing your way and all your concerns to God, praising him for spiritual consolations and hopes. Though your situation may be obscure, and your *circumstances* low, you may yet be a great *blessing* in the station in which you are provided.

dentially placed, by a holy, consistent example; and by using what talent or means you may possess, with a view to the glory of your Lord and to the good of your fellow creatures.

6. I would address the candidate for communion that may possess *some intellectual advantages*. You may, perhaps, have been favoured with early advantages; your mind may have been cultivated and exercised by a good education; you may have a sound understanding; a quick apprehension; a retentive memory; you may be able to speak with ease and propriety on divine subjects. Whatever you may possess of this kind, consecrate it to God on the altar of the gospel: and use all in a becoming manner for the good of the church with which you may become connected. You are not to "think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." "Whatever you do, do it as of the ability that God giveth; that God in all may be glorified through Christ Jesus." You may be useful in the exercises of social prayer. Encourage and sustain such meetings by your presence, and your assistance; there go with your christian brethren to present your desires to God for your mutual benefit, and for the prosperity of religion amongst you. By instructing the young you

may be a blessing. Employ your talents for their good, by opening to them the word of God, and by seeking to impress its truths on their hearts. Endeavour to find out the thoughtful, the inquiring, the anxious, that may be in the congregation to which you belong ; and employ the talent you have by conversing with them ; aiming to deepen the impressions that they have received, and to guide them in the right way to life eternal. Look out habitually, as you are going on in the christian journey, for opportunities of usefulness. Strive to know what are the talents you possess, and employ them faithfully and diligently ; let not one lie dormant or be sinfully concealed. Never ostentatiously display but usefully improve them. Then like the faithful servant you will find that the talents your Lord gave, have increased and become double by a proper improvement of them. And you will know that “ he that watereth others, shall be watered also himself.” “ Be not weary in well doing, for in due time you shall reap if you faint not.” When you unite yourself openly to a church, you in effect say, “ Now all that I am, and all that I have, I here publicly devote to God.” “ Therefore, beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ; forasmuch as ye know that *your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*”

CHAPTER VI.

ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS OF THE PIOUS, WHO REFRAIN FROM COMMUNION WITH A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

THERE is one question to which every follower of Christ should be concerned to obtain a clear and definite answer in reference to every point of christian practice, i. e. what is the will of him whom I regard as my Lord, and ruler. On the subject of christian fellowship, the servant of the Saviour should ask, is it the will of Christ, that a follower of his should stand in a state of separation from any christian society; or that he should enter into a state of actual and intimate fellowship with some such society? Is it his will that the connection of his people with himself and with one another should be openly made manifest before the world, by acts of united communion at his table; or that they should make no such manifestation of their regard to him, and of their connection with each other? If a christian will go to the records of the Saviour's will to seek an answer to these inquiries, he may obtain it we think, without much difficulty. And on the supposition that a clear answer can be obtained, and

is found there, by the inquiring mind, and that is seen by such a mind, that it is the will of Christ that there should be a visible fellowship among his people, that they should be united in christian societies, for great and important purposes, when then, the whole matter should be considered and decided. If this is the case, the path of duty is plain. No objections should prevail against the will of the Redeemer. If he requires it, the obligation is imperative. Whatever there may be in the circumstances that attend or surround the christian that appear as obstacles in the way, they should be resolutely surmounted. "Beware every objection," the christian should say, "since it is the will of Christ, I must obey, and would cheerfully obey. As he requires it, the path is plain; and as a proof of my allegiance to him, I must go forward, to give myself to his people according to his will." On this principle every servant of the Saviour should endeavour to act, and then we should not be required to employ many words, or to occupy much space in answering objections. But alas! there are a considerable number we fear, who though they acknowledge that it is their duty to obey Christ, and they do not deny that this is his will concerning his followers, yet they suffer various objections to prevail with them to neglect, or to stand aloof from the fellowship of the church. Th

being the case, I shall endeavour briefly to answer some of the principal objections that prevail over the pious mind.

1. The first objection in such cases often is to this effect, "I fear that I am not fit to become a member of a christian church." In answer to this I would say, if you mean by this objection that you are not a christian; that you do not repent of sin; do not believe the gospel; have no love to Christ; no pious principle in the heart; no concern to honour God in the life; then you are not fit to be a member of a christian church; you have no right to the table of the Lord; you are not fit for the communion of the saints. But then if this is your case, you are equally unfit for heaven. You have no connection with Christ no possession of the blessings of salvation. You are yet in the road to ruin, as an impenitent unbelieving sinner. And you are called first to repent of sin, to believe on the Saviour, to become reconciled to God, that his anger may pass away from you, and his favour descend upon you, and that you may "pass from death unto life."

But those to whom I have a more special reference as making this objection, are not such as are living in impenitence and unbelief, but persons, who though they have turned from sin and received the Saviour, have at the same time such a humbling sense of their remaining defici-

encies, that they feel, as if they were not fit for communion with a church of Christ. With such I would expostulate. Do you not feel the evil of sin? Are you not conscious of your need of a Redeemer? Do you not approve of the whole character and work of Christ? Are you not committing your eternal all into his all-sufficient hands? Are you not conscious of some love to his name and his service? Would you not esteem it a privilege to be united with his people? And are you not willing to walk in all his appointed ways? Can you not answer in the affirmative to these inquiries? Yes. But still you say that you feel so unworthy of such a privilege, that you cannot venture to embrace it. There are so many remaining evils in your heart, and there is so much deficiency in your life, so great is your degeneracy and depravity, that you think you can never come to the table of the Lord, until you feel better in your spiritual state, and can come in a different condition to what you can now. Here let me ask you, what you suppose to be the most suitable and acceptable state in which you can come to such an ordinance? Would it be to come with a high idea of your own attainments; with a spirit of self-sufficiency; a dependance on your own strength *and resources*; a confidence in your own *security*? No. You see at once that this would not

be proper. Then in what way would you come to such an engagement? Surely, with a deep, heart-humbling sense of your own unworthiness and insufficiency; with an entire dependance on the atonement and grace of the Redeemer; relying on his all-sufficiency; connected with a deep concern that you may have a growing acquaintance with him; and may attain at length a complete conformity to him. And is not this the state in which you can *now* come? If you have a most humble, abasing sense of your own depravity and sinfulness, attended with a believing dependance upon Christ, and a concern after conformity to him, this is the most fit and the most acceptable state in which you *can* come to the table of the Lord, and to the communion of his church. If you wait ever so long to try to prepare yourself for these things, you must at last come, if you come aright, as a poor sinner, depending on a gracious Saviour, fixing your hope on him alone for life and eternal salvation. Delay not then a practical regard to what you see to be the will of your Lord, but at once go forward; unite yourself to his people, and profess your attachment to him.

2. A second objector might say. "I fear lest after having made a profession I should disgrace the cause of Christ, and bring a reproach on his holy name." It is very proper that you should

cherish a holy fear of yourself ; a jealousy over your own heart ; and a sense of the dangers that surround you ; that you should be aware of the dishonour that would be brought on the name and cause of the Redeemer, if after having become united to his people, you should openly sin against him. In this sense, "happy is the man that feareth always." This fear is salutary, when it is exercised in a proper manner. But this fear becomes sinful, when it deters from the path of duty, when it prevails to such a degree as to keep us back from doing what Christ has enjoined upon his followers. Then the fear that is in man bringeth a snare ; proves injurious to the soul, and dishonourable to God. "Millions of souls," says one, "have been helped on to perdition by the misconduct of nominal christians ; and you ought to tremble at the idea of adding to the number ; but God's grace is sufficient for you. The way of duty is the way of safety ; and none are so likely to be kept from falling, as they who enter on their course with a holy fear of falling." If you were to fall into sin now, you would nearly to an equal degree dishonour the Saviour, because you must be known, if you are in heart decided for Christ, as one who pays some regard to real religion ; and you would injure your own soul and offend your God. *Though open sin, after a public profession, is*

attended with some peculiar aggravations, and may bring some greater evils, than in cases where this profession has not been made; yet if the fear of this leads you to keep back from the known path of duty, you are only indulging in one sin, in order to avoid another, "and are thus guilty of the inconsistency, of actually doing wrong lest you should do it." You are living in disobedience to the Saviour now; and depriving yourself of many advantages that he has provided for you. You cannot suppose that you shall be really more in danger of falling into sin, after a profession than before. On the contrary, it would rather act as a guard to your mind; and be a stimulus to you in the path of duty. It is when you are found in the paths of obedience, acting upon christian principle, going forward according to the will of your Lord, in dependance upon his grace, that you may expect the most abundant supplies of his upholding and quickening influence, to sustain you in his ways, and to help you to live to the glory of his name. So that you may according to the promise, "hold on your way and grow stronger and stronger." If you are attentive to the Saviour's will, while you are placing your entire dependance on his aid, you may go forward with cheerful confidence hoping to be enabled so to walk as to honour the christian profession, and to glorify the name of

your Lord, hearing him say, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "For my grace is sufficient for thee:" "my strength is made perfect in thy weakness."

3. Another objector will say, "I see so much imperfection and inconsistency amongst those that are united to the church, that I feel that I cannot comfortably commune with them. I want to see things in a different state in the church where I attend, before I become united to that church." In answer to such an objection there is some concession to be made; there are some inquiries to be proposed; and the right grounds of decision to be stated. It must be conceded that there are many glaring imperfections amongst some that are united to the churches of Christ; and that there are many inconsistencies that might be pointed out in the spirit and conduct of professors; and that where these prevail great injury is done to the interests of religion. Without knowing any thing of the particular cases to which you may allude; or of the circumstances of the church where you attend; it must be confessed that there is reason for thoughtful persons, sometimes to look with concern on the conduct of some that stand connected with a church of Christ. But while all this is frankly conceded, *would it not* be proper for you to inquire, whether *it is in the* exercise of a right spirit that you are

looking upon the failings of others : If you had paid more attention to the state of your own heart ; if you had viewed aright the deep depravity and the manifold corruptions that are working there ; if you were attentive to what passed within your own breast, and watched over your own temper and conduct, would you not discern enough deeply to humble your own spirit, and to lead you to look less at the imperfections of others ? Would not the proper exercise of that charity " that thinketh no evil, that hopeth all things, believeth all things, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth," have brought you to look with a candid eye upon the failings of others ; to make the best of things which the case would bear ; and while you might have cause secretly to mourn over many evils that you saw, would it not teach you to pity and to pray for those over whom these evils prevailed ? Instead of keeping back from communion with those whom, in the judgment of charity, you could not but consider as followers of Christ, should you not endeavour to cast the mantle of love over their failings ; and by the manifestation of a spirit and conduct becoming the gospel, try to elevate the standard of piety amongst them ?

Then after having made these concessions, and urged these inquiries, I would entreat you

to consider whether the ground of duty on this subject does not remain unaltered and strong ? Does not the authority of Christ enjoin it upon you ? Do not the express discoveries and appointments of his gospel show it to be binding upon his followers ? If you feel obliged to reply in the affirmative to these inquiries, then consider ; how can you plead the inconsistencies of others when you are living in the known, open, glaring, inconsistency of refusing to yield obedience to the Saviour's will, and that because others are not completely conformed to that will ? Remember that no part of the conduct of others can furnish any excuse for yours if you are found living in known disobedience to the will of Christ. Nothing of this nature can release his servants from the obligations under which they are laid to obey him. If you can find a society where you have reason to hope that its members are united together in the bonds of the gospel, to bear a testimony before the world of their connection with Christ, to promote their mutual good and the glory of their Lord, though you may discern many failings amongst them, the path of duty is plain, that with such a society you should seek to be united.

4. Another objector says, "are there not many *that go to* heaven without joining a church on *earth* ; and are there not many good people now

that are not members of any distinct christian community ; and therefore may it not be as well for me to remain as I am." In reply to your inquiry I would ask you another question or two. Do you see it to be the will of Christ that his people should profess him before men in the way that we recommend ? If you do, why is it that you wish to evade the force of obligation to obey the will of Christ ? Why is it that you wish to stand aloof from the communion of saints in the way which the gospel points out ? Are you ashamed to appear for Christ ? Is there some worldly obstacle in the way ? Is there some cross which in that case you must take up that you want to avoid ? Is there something in your spirit and practice which you know would not be in accordance with an open profession of the gospel but which still you wish to cherish ? If there be nothing of this kind, why is it that you want to take shelter under the neglects of others, to justify your own neglects of known duty ? Suppose the case, that many may have gone safely on without this union to a church on earth ; suppose they did not see the path of duty in this respect clear before them ; or suppose they, from some other cause, lost the benefits of christian communion in this way ; can this furnish any sufficient reason for you to venture on the same course and suffer the same loss ? If

there are many christians now standing aloof from communion with the church, why should you wish to increase their number, and to add to their improper influence, by your own conduct and example? Is it not rather desirable that that number should be lessened; that all that love the Saviour's name should unite to profess that name, to uphold his interest, to show forth his death, and to seek the glory of their Lord? Is it a day when the followers of Christ should be cold, and distant, and heartless, in his service; and when they should refuse to do what his word requires for the advancement of his cause; for the honour of his name? While his enemies combine together against his cause, should not all his friends be engaged together to serve his interest? Whatever others may have done in days past, whatever many may be doing now, let it be your humble and firm resolve, that you will discover and pursue the path of duty, and "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

"Suppose the neglect of christian communion was more common than it is, both amongst the aged and the young, could you have the heart to draw an argument from thence. 'My dearest friend, my most gracious benefactor, is generally neglected: his dying command, his dying love, *is* in a great measure forgotten; and therefore I *will forget him*;' I will neglect him.' Say christian,

could a generous mind reconcile itself to such a thought? Could a pious soul draw such a consequence as this? Methinks the argument is quite the contrary way. Therefore, Oh my compassionate Saviour, will I attend with the greater solicitude, that I may if possible shame others out of their neglect; or at least may in part supply their lack of service; and bear my testimony against an ungrateful generation who call themselves thy disciples, and neglect this distinguishing badge of their profession, this gracious memorial of thy dying love."*

5. Another is saying, "I am greatly afraid that if I were to join a church of Christ, I should approach unworthily to the Table of the Lord; there is one passage which strikes terror to my heart, where the apostle says, 'he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh *damnation* to himself.' Before you suffer the sound of such a passage to keep you back from the ordinance to which it refers, it is desirable that you should endeavour to obtain a correct view of its meaning. Many disorders were prevailing in the church at Corinth to which this epistle was addressed; these disorders attended their administration of the Lord's Supper; they did not attend upon it in a suitable spirit, or in

* Doddridge.

a consistent manner. Now such disorders in a church, God would not suffer to go unpunished. Many of them were afflicted; others removed by death. "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." God will not let his ordinances be trifled with, or attended upon in an inconsistent manner, without some tokens of his disapprobation. What he sent upon them on this account might be justly denominated *judgments* from the divine hand, as tokens of God's displeasure on account of their sin. Hence the proper rendering of the passage that has such an appalling sound in our translation would be, "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself."

An eminent commentator remarks, "that to show still further the necessity of self-examination, the apostle declares that every one who unworthily partakes of this sacred feast, would eat and drink judgment to himself. His very attendance on this religious service would offend God, and expose him to his righteous judgment, because he made no proper discrimination between the bread and wine which represented the Lord's body as offered on the cross a sacrifice for our sins to be received by faith, and an ordinary meal. This irreverence being a heinous *crime*, would doubtless, subject a man to final

condemnation if he did not repent ; but certainly the apostle did not mean that it was in its own nature unpardonable, or that it sealed a man's damnation, as very many have supposed ; for he was addressing christians, warning them to beware of incurring those temporal judgments, with which God chastised his offending servants. The scruples and consequent neglect of numbers, who seem in other things to obey Christ, have no ground in this passage, except in the apparent harshness of our translation, in which the word that signifies judgment, is rendered damnation, and this commonly means eternal punishment. Indeed the conscious unworthiness and lamented infirmities of those who desire to express their gratitude for redeeming love, are widely different from the profanations of these Corinthians, who yet, were not at all supposed to have sinned beyond the hope of pardon ; and generally those who deem themselves most unworthy, are least likely to receive unworthily, which is commonly the sin of the careless, and proud, and self-sufficient. But the Apostle fully explains his meaning in what follows, for he observes, that on account of these profanations many of them were visited with enfeebling and wasting sickness ; and several had even been cut off by death ; which being called sleep, was charitably supposed to be that of believers. For if men

would call themselves to an account for their conduct ; and humble themselves before God in deep repentance ; they would escape many temporal calamities, as well as final condemnation ; but when christians were thus judged, and visited with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death ; they were chastened of the Lord, that being led to repentance they might not be condemned with the world." You may now see that there is nothing here to hinder the approach of any humble believing soul that is concerned to attend on such an ordinance in a suitable manner.

6. A pious young person may state another objection, " I am too young to make a public profession, I must wait until I am further advanced in life, before I dare venture to join a church of Christ." Humility and self-diffidence always become the disciples of Christ, especially a young disciple, and let it be your constant concern to "be clothed with humility." But at the same time you are to remember, that your being now in the morning of life, forms no objection to your admission to the fellowship of the saints ; and can furnish no excuse for your neglect of that privilege, if you have consecrated yourself in early life to the Redeemer, if you are willing to follow Christ through all your future days, *and if you understand and approve of what is*

included in an open profession of his name and an union to his church. Rather should I say, as you are distinguished, you trust, by the blessing of early piety, which is attended with the most important advantages, you are more especially called upon in this way to testify your gratitude to the Redeemer and to make known the consecration of your lives early to his service. With all the warmth and fervour of your youthful feelings of regard to Christ and his people, you should go forward, and unite with your fellow christians, in commemorating your Saviour's love. Only let it be attended with the humility and modesty which are peculiarly becoming your years, and you may cheerfully go and confess Christ before men. Though you may feel that you are young and feeble, and the work before you is great; while many dangers may be before you in your earthly pilgrimage, and many foes may assail you; yet committing your case into the hands of your Lord, and looking to his all-sufficient grace, you may implicitly confide in him, to lead you safely and honourably through all. Setting out in early life in the christian profession, will give you the most favourable and abundant opportunities for improvement, if your days are prolonged, in divine knowledge, and in all the graces of the christian character; and will present to you the best means, and the

most suitable seasons for usefulness in the world and in the church, as you go on in your course. Do not cast away then the advantages that you possess, by neglecting to appear for the Saviour by an open profession of his name, while you are young. Make it principally your great concern that you may appear for him in a right spirit, with right motives, with right and exalted aims; that you may be an ornament to the christian profession; and may do worthily for God in your day and generation.

7. Another may be ready to say, "But if I should apostatize at last, what aggravated guilt should I incur."

I cannot do better than answer this objection in the language of the excellent Doddridge, who says, "I readily own, that should this be the case it would in a dreadful degree inflame your guilt, and aggravate your misery; that you had not only known the way of righteousness; but that you had eaten and drunk in the presence of the Lord. But have you any thoughts of drawing back from him, that you are thus cautious to avoid an instituted ordinance, merely because in that case it would aggravate your ruin? So would every prayer you offer, and every sermon you hear; but should that thought prevent your *coming* to the throne of grace, or drive you from *the house of God*?

Nay, to strike home, I will add, that with regard to you my friends, the caution comes too late. I speak of those who have not only tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, but have made trial of the ways of wisdom and piety, and have had some experience in them; and as for you, I must plainly and faithfully declare, that it is not for you of all people in the world, to think of gentle flames and tolerable damnation. No, my brethren, that hope, wretched as it is, if you shall fall away, is unavoidably cut off from you; and all your schemes must be for nothing less than certain salvation, and exalted glory. And to your comfort let me tell you, that though it is always the duty of 'him that thinketh he standeth to take heed lest he fall,' yet you have all imaginable reason to trust the promises of an everlasting covenant; and to rely upon the great Redeemer who hath declared that he 'will give unto his sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of his hand;' or 'be able to separate them from his love.' If then you fear the dreadful consequences of apostacy, which would indeed be dreadful, beyond all your fears, keep near to him as the great Shepherd; and let those very fears, rather engage you to an early and diligent attendance on this, and every other appointed method of approach, than

drive you away from it. It is most reasonable to say, "Since there are so many professors that draw back even to perdition, I will wait upon the Lord, that I may renew my strength, and so be enabled to endure to the end; that I may receive the end of my faith, in the salvation of my soul. If your fears operate thus, they may be a means of preventing the evil of which you are so apprehensive."

To conclude. This subject, dear reader, must at least demand your serious consideration. As it is certainly set forth in the records of the Redeemer's will; as it appears in the precepts and examples of his inspired servants; as it is still regarded by a great number of devoted followers of Christ; and as it has now been presented seriously to your attention you cannot pass it by with indifference, and yet be blameless. Think of it as in the presence of your omniscient Lord. Search his holy word that you may know his will more fully concerning it; examine yourself in reference to it; and especially implore the guidance of divine wisdom, to lead and teach you as to the way in which you should go. Let this be attended with a full settled purpose of soul, that if God will clearly shew to you the path of duty, *you will walk therein, with decision and steadfastness of mind, in dependence on the aids of his*

grace. Then the result will be most happy and important to yourself, and it will redound to the glory of God, and promote the benefit of his church. "To the only wise God our Saviour be glory for ever." Amen.

FINIS.

